

# Roosevelt's Concentration Camps

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**T**WENTY-THREE YEARS AGO, on June 30, 1946, America's concentration camps for 112,985 Americans of Japanese descent (Nisei and Issei) were officially declared abolished. On February 19, 1942, when Japanese victories had created a panicky fear of a West Coast invasion, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the professed champion of pure democracy and world brotherhood, signed Order No. 9066 and on March 18, Order No. 9102 ordering Japanese Americans evacuated from the West Coast and to be confined, without charge, hearing or trial, in inland concentration camps.

Roosevelt and his fellow New Dealers proved thereby that during a total war no government has ever been truly democratic or constitutionally fair to all its own inhabitants, let alone alien ones. National Socialist Germany was not, but neither was holier-than-thou Rooseveltian America.

## **Rights Abrogated in Both World Wars**

America at present is convulsed by hordes of protesters against our Vietnam intervention who claim the right to burn their draft cards, carry pro-enemy slogans, and even burn the American flag.

Had any German-American attempted the like in World War I or II, he would probably have been lynched and certainly been put in jail. In World War II the Japanese Americans of the West Coast, even though they could be accused of not one act of subversion or sabotage, were clamped in ten

"Relocation Camps" for the duration only because the Rooseveltians considered all persons of Japanese blood "potentially dangerous."

*Time* Magazine in "The Right to Dissent and the Right to Answer" (May 12, 1967) marvels how brash today's protesters are when we are fighting communists, and how soft they are treated, compared to the harshness and real repression applied when we were fighting German and Japanese:

"During World War I's anti-German hysteria, the 1918 Sedition Act prescribed 20 years' imprisonment for war dissenters. Superpatriots banned the teaching of German in 25 states, cheered sweeping federal raids on 60,000 'radicals' in 1920, and even put over Prohibition as a 'war measure.' In World War II, the Supreme Court itself approved the most drastic invasion of constitutional rights in our history—the 1942 'relocation' in semi-concentration camps of 112,000 West Coast Japanese, two-thirds of them U. S. citizens by birth."

## **The Roundup and "Relocation"**

On April 1, 1942, people in California woke up to find posters all over, reading "Instructions to all Persons of Japanese Ancestry" with this message:

"All Japanese persons, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated from the above designated area by 12:00 o'clock noon Tuesday, April 7, 1942.

"No Japanese person will be permitted to enter or leave the above

described area after 8:00 A. M., Thursday, April 2, 1942, without obtaining special permission from the Provost Marshal at the Civil Control Station. . . ."

But there had been ominous warnings, injustices, and arrests before. The day after Pearl Harbor a Federal order froze the bank credits of all Japanese Americans. As a tragic result, a great many Japanese American businesses were closed down, forced into bankruptcy or ruinous sales. Furthermore, as early as January 29, 1942, the U. S. Attorney General ordered enemy aliens to evacuate certain "strategic areas," touching off panic and loss.

On February 2, without warning, FBI agents rushed into Terminal Island, a fishing settlement, "and arrested 336 Issei (non-naturalized Japanese immigrants) on Presidential warrants as potential enemy agents." On February 10, the U.S. Justice Department informed the remnant of the five hundred families of the island that they must evacuate within 48 hours.

Allan R. Bosworth in his *America's Concentration Camps* (Norton, N.Y., 283 pages, \$5.95) describes how profiteers then bought the household possessions and merchandise of the frightened people at ridiculous prices. One woman whose husband had already been arrested got \$4,000 for an inventory valued at \$25,000. Many of their belongings had to be abandoned altogether.

This, of course, was also the case during the mass evacuation from February to August.

### **Rugged Life in the Camps**

After the 112,985 West Coast Americans of Japanese blood had been rounded up, they were first herded for some six months into "assembly centers" or staging areas until the ten Relocation Camps had been constructed. The sixteen Assembly Centers were race tracks, fairgrounds, livestock exposition facilities, an abandoned Civ-

ilian Conservation Corps Camp, an old mill site.

Buses took the internees to them. Only what personal effects they could carry was allowed them. Military police searched all suitcases and boxes. The Centers had barbed wire fences, soldiers with machine guns watched the gates.

The Centers were equipped with community showers, toilets, laundries, a hospital, and post exchange. Internees were given nominal allowances in the form of coupon books: single adults \$2.50 per month; children under sixteen, \$1.00; married couples \$4.00. In addition, those capable had to work 44 hours a week for "convict" wages. While in civilian life, wage were sky-high, unskilled internees got \$8 a month, skilled ones \$12, and professional ones, like doctors and dentists from \$16 to a maximum of \$19 a month. They got for the work of a month what free Americans got for a day! Yet no one has ever suggested that their income lost through slave-labor be compensated for, as little as anyone has suggested that German prisoners of war farmed out as slave-laborers according to the Morgenthau Plan be compensated!

The meals supplied at the Assembly Centers seem to have been supplied in the kind of soup kitchens President Roosevelt envisaged for the vanquished German people, except that the food was more solid than soup, including, for example, pork and beans. One can say that, while everybody was cramped, and everything was primitive and full of hardships, nobody in the Assembly Centers starved or froze to death.

### **Milton Eisenhower Commands Camps**

In March 1942, Milton Eisenhower, youngest brother of General Dwight Eisenhower, was appointed to the ugly position of director for the War Relocation Camps, a euphemism for what were America's concentration camps. If it is fair to call any German a war

criminal who helped in the construction of concentration camps, then Milton Eisenhower would be a worse one for being the director.

By mid-June, the Army had approved eleven such camps for 130,000 persons, of which ten were used. They were tar-paper barracks in desert locations, surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by armed military police. Conditions in general were like those in the assembly centers.

*Time Magazine* (August 11, 1961) described the camps as follows:

"At the half-completed relocation centers, the evacuees were dismayed to find no inside plumbing, and in the frigid camps of Wyoming and Idaho, the only protection against the winter cold consisted of antique pot-bellied stoves.

"Bachelors were jammed 30 to a tarpaper-covered barrack, and each one-room, 20-foot by 25-foot 'apartment' was shared by two families."

### War-time Racial Crime

For honorable Americans, who heard our Morgenthaus demand, long before there were any imputations of "gassings" or murder in German concentration camps, that all Germans who tolerated concentration camps for Jews should be executed, our war-time concentration camps for the whole Japanese population on the West Coast are a great humiliation.

How could the self-righteous Rooseveltians, even while crusading in Europe against national socialistic Germany fundamentally only because it discriminated racially against Jews, do in principle precisely the same thing to its Nisei?

In June 1967, when the San Diego *Union* interviewed the retiring Supreme Court Justice Thomas C. Clark, he said that of his many blunders during his career he publicly acknowledges only two, the Nuremberg Trial of the vanquished and the war-time internment of the Nisei. Specifically of the latter

he said that it discriminated against persons certainly of foreign extraction but otherwise citizens of the country, our fellow citizens. "We rounded them up to place them in concentration camps. That is the truth of the matter."

### Others Call Camps a Mistake

Professor Eugene V. Rostow of Yale University, former Under Secretary for Political Affairs, State Department, brother of Walt, who was President Johnson's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, in an article, in *Harper's Magazine* (Sept. 1945), entitled "Our Worst Wartime Mistake," called the incarceration of the Nisei "a tragic and serious mistake . . . almost incredible." (He should have added that by Nuremberg Trial standards, it was not only a mistake but also a war crime!)

"Its motivation," he wrote, "and its impact on our system of law deny every value of democracy."

Dr. Morton Grodzins, in his very scholarly book, *Americans Betrayed: Politics and the Japanese Evacuation* (University of Chicago Press, 1949, 444 pages) calls it "without precedent in American history . . . the first time that the United States government condemned a large group of people to barbed-wire inclosures . . . the first even in which danger to the nation's welfare was determined by group characteristics rather than by individual guilt . . . the first program in which race alone determined whether an American would remain free or become incarcerated" (page 1).

### Similarity in Treatment

The man who until recently was the Supreme Court Chief Justice, Earl Warren, whose decisions are almost monotonously in favor of the Negro minority, of communistic subversives, of pornographers and criminals, was the California Attorney General who demanded and master-minded the crime against the Nisei. On February 2, 1942,

Warren told a mass meeting of California sheriffs and district attorneys that "all alien Japanese be forthwith evacuated... to some place in the interior." He told a congressional committee "that there is more potential danger among the group of Japanese who were born in this country than from alien Japanese who were born in Japan." (See Bosworth book cited above, p. 73).

It is ironic that Eichmann during his trial gave the same argument of "potential danger" for having put European Jews in concentration camps!

But though Eichmann has been executed for his part in the rounding up of Jews, Justice Warren continues to bask in power and glory and has not to this day, as for example Justice Clark, expressed contrition for his part in what the *Chicago Tribune* called the Days of Infamy!

### **All Japanese are Alike!**

When some humanitarian groups urged individual screening to detect these potentially dangerous, DeWitt countered that "it would be practically impossible to establish the loyalty of any one of Japanese race. A Jap's a Jap. Once a Jap, always a Jap." That reminds one of Hitler's explanation to Physicist Max Planck that "the Jews are all Communists—it is against these that I am fighting—all Jews stick together like burrs... therefore I must proceed uniformly against all Jews." (See *Bulletin. Amer. Asso. of University Professors*, Autumn, 1956, p. 439).

The then governor of California, Culbert L. Olson, said that while some Japanese Americans were loyal, they all looked alike, so that by May of 1942 he wanted all the Japanese removed. Governor Charles Sprague of Oregon on February 17 demanded "more thorough action for protection against possible alien activity, particularly by Japanese residing on the coast..." Only Governor Arthur B.

### **NISEI, ISSEI OR KIBEI?**

**NISEI**—In Japanese this word means literally "second generation." Nisei is a native American citizen born of immigrant Japanese parents and educated in the United States.

**ISSEI**—In Japanese this means "first generation." Issei is a Japanese who emigrated to the United States after the Oriental exclusion proclamation of 1907 and was thus ineligible by law (until 1952) to become an American citizen.

**KIBEI**—A native American citizen born of immigrant Japanese parents but educated largely in Japan.

Langlie of the State of Washington was moderate and cautioned against inhumane and un-American measures. But his attorney general, Smith Troy, thought that to protect the forests from incendiarism and, oddly, to protect the Japanese from mob violence, all Japanese, alien and citizens should be evacuated as quickly as possible. He felt "that we know the Italian and German people better" so as not to require their evacuation.

### **Congress Approved Crime**

Of course, some Americans indeed protested the internment of the Japanese, among them for example Senator Taft and FBI Chief J. Edgar Hoover. But like Germans who opposed wartime Germany's treatment of Jews, such Americans were ignored. *Time Magazine* reports:

"There was not one effective voice of U. S. protest. The Congress passed a bill supporting the move; only one Senator, Robert Taft, voiced strong opposition to the theory of evacuation."

That the very bastion of democracy, the Congress, could during wartime hysteria and fear of invasion sanction the racist violation of all constitutional rights of an innocent minority on grounds of "potential danger" is a frightening reminder that democracy is



no guarantee against prejudice, injustice, and war!

Worst of all, these solons of our great democracy allowed themselves to be tricked into arguing as if the evacuation affected only *aliens*, not also naturalized and native-born American citizens. Although Senator Taft called it "probably the 'sloppiest' criminal law I have ever read or seen anywhere," nevertheless both houses of Congress passed this Public Law 503 overwhelmingly, which in fact robbed a minority of its constitutional rights just as certainly and on the same grounds as any laws of Nazi Germany against Jews.

### **Supreme Court Also Approves**

Through this law the Supreme Court, normally the watchdog of a democracy, was perverted into declaring America's worst outburst of racist persecution constitutional.

One Nisei resisted the curfew and another the evacuation, and their cases ultimately reached the Supreme Court. The Catholic Judge Frank Murphy called the mass evacuation an "ugly abyss of racism" and the Court's upholding it a "legalization of racism." The Episcopal Justice Robert H. Jackson accused the majority of distorting "the Constitution to approve all that the military may deem expedient."

It is ironic that Justice Felix Frankfurter, listed as born in Austria and Hebrew, not only legalized what Justice Jackson called "a loaded weapon" against minorities but rationalized it in a manner which the Nazis could use to justify anything they are alleged to have done to European Jews. He said that the Constitution means that in wartime anything the military considers necessary is constitutional!

### **Nisei Spared as War is Won**

Of course, when we Americans think of our wartime concentration camps for the Nisei and Issei, we derive much consolation from the circumstances that in the end these un-

fortunates were not executed. But this is considerably dimmed by the reflection that as long as we feared invasion we treated the Nisei worse and worse, just as the Nazis did the Jews. When the danger passed and we were spared invasion, we did not go on to kill them—but relaxed, and finally released them. Only literally the Holy Ghost can know what we would have done if bombs had fallen on our cities every night, if Japanese forces had landed and were pushing ruthlessly forward (raping and murdering as the Soviet armies did on invading Germany), if there had been a probability that as they released the Nisei they would turn on us as Ilya Ehrenberg made it probable that Jews released from the concentration camp would turn on the Germans!

This is not to justify anything. What we did to the Nisei was a crime, what the Nazis did to the Jews is a worse crime. But both were the product of wartime hysteria and real or fancied danger. Had the danger for Germany subsided, perhaps the Nazis would have become sane again, too. And only God can know, literally, what our Rooseveltians would have done if they like the Nazis had been threatened with Unconditional Surrender and the genocidal Morgenthau Plan!

### **THE AUTHOR**

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